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ABSTRACT

This document presents some facts, interpretations, trendline indications and opinions on postsecondary/collegiate enrollments in America. Following introductory material, freshmen enrollments, enrollment trends, brief comments upon those developments, and factors to consider in the future are discussed. (MJM)

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COLLEGE AND UNIVERSITY ENROLLMENTS IN THE UNITED STATES

GARLAND G. PARKER

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Garland G. Parker

ACT SPECIAL REPORT EIGHT*

*Adapted from addresses given in East Lansing, Michigan March 16, 1973 at the Annual Spring Meeting of the Michigan Advisory Council of The American College Testing Program; and in Ames, Iowa March 21, 1973 at the Annual Spring Meeting of the Iowa Advisory Council of The American College Testing Program.

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PREFACE

The author is appreciative of the generous reception given to his address on "College and University Enrollments in America" by the members of the Michigan and Iowa Advisory Councils of The American College Testing Program in their Annual Spring Meetings on March 16 and 21, 1973, respectively. In response to the request of those present and ACT representatives, the manuscript has been revised by the author, preparatory to its reproduction and distribution to the representatives of the ACT participating institutions.

While much of the content of this paper was prepared originally for presentation at the indicated meetings, it also is true that the author has relied heavily upon his articles on postsecondary/collegiate enrollments in the February and April, 1973, issues of the journal *Intellect*. Understandably, frequent citations to these copyrighted articles are made. The author wishes to express especial thanks to A. J. Buchanan and Cliff Bunting, Presidents of the ACT Michigan and Iowa Advisory Councils; Michael V. Mulligan, ACT Midwestern Region Assistant Director; and Fred F. Harcleroad, ACT President, for their strong support and the many courtesies extended in relation to the two speaking engagements.

March 27, 1973

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COLLEGE AND UNIVERSITY ENROLLMENTS IN THE UNITED STATES

Garland G. Parker

This writer is pleased to share some facts, interpretations, trendline indications, and opinions on postsecondary/collegiate enrollments in America. Even so, he pretends to no omniscience or clairvoyance in his assessments in this field. Indeed, any information and perspectives others have on the subject are solicited and will be appreciated. Nevertheless, some 13 years of studying and interpreting collegiate enrollments in the annual *Intellect* (formerly *School & Society*) studies have been enlightening and instructive. In addition, through the good offices of The American College Testing Program and its President, Dr. Fred F. Harcleroad, support has been given to the first in-depth report on "Enrollments in American Two-Year Colleges, 1972-73," that appeared in the April 1973 issue of *Intellect*. Finally, the writing of *The Enrollment Explosion* book in 1971 forced the author factually and critically to review enrollment developments and their interrelationships with higher education and American history generally over the 50-year period, 1919-1969.[1] This intensive involvement with the matrices and implications of enrollments impresses upon one the exceeding intricacy and interaction of highly complex factors that bear upon enrollment developments. Having noted the need for caution, the writer understands that the situation calls for him to make bold pronouncements upon enrollment facts and trends—which, with much scholastic trepidation, he will do!

In the 1,428 institutions surveyed in the traditional *Intellect* study for 1972-73, inclusive of "four-year colleges, upper-division colleges, other baccalaureate degree-granting schools; and those two-year or junior colleges administered by institutions in the above catagories,"[2] hereafter referred to as 4-year colleges, the

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[1]Garland G. Parker, *The Enrollment Explosion: A Half-Century of Attendance in U.S. Colleges and Universities* (New York: School & Society Books, 1971).

[2]Garland G. Parker, "College and University Enrollments in America, 1972-73; Statistics, Interpretations, and Trends," *Intellect*, 101:2347, February 1973, p. 315.

opening fall grand total enrollment in 1972-73 was 6,407,050. Of this number, 4,755,795 were full-time and 1,651,255 were part-time students.[3] Essentially, the 4-year baccalaureate schools comprise this group of surveyed schools. In all such units reporting comparably for 1971-72 and 1972-73, the grand total increase was only .2%. The full-time count, for the first time since 1952-53, showed a slight decline of .4%; but part-time students registered a significant 2.1% increase.[4] By way of comparison, the initial study of enrollments in 700 American 2-year colleges showed a grand total student count of 1,679,127. In 2-year schools reporting in all three categories, the grand total was 1,653,551, the full-time number 845,145, and the part-time figure 808,406. In comparable situations, the grand total increase was 5.7%, the slight full-time rise was .2%, but the part-time count with a 12.9% gain outdistanced by far the other categories reviewed here.[5]

Freshman Enrollments

Freshman enrollments comprise the most important input factor to the mainstream of postsecondary/higher education. In the *Intellect* studies, the findings for the 4-year schools revealed a decrease of 3.1% in the 800,945 full-time classified freshman enrollees in 876 comparably reporting institutions.[6] In 491 comparably reporting 2-year schools, the classified freshman total of 524,212 was down by only .2%.[7] The figure for the final higher education opening fall grand total enrollment still was available, only as an estimate, as late as March 1973. As early as September 1972, this author projected an overall 2% increase and so went on press release record on October 20 and December 8, 1972; and, on the basis of tentative totals then being provided orally by United States Office of Education (USOE) representatives, estimated that the final total would be 9,215,500.[8] He was corroborated by the USOE on the 2% percentage increase in its prepublication estimate on December 11, 1972, but the USOE-estimated total was set at 9,204,156.[9] Partly in reflection of the presumably shifting USOE total for 1971-72, and on the basis of further study of

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[3]Ibid.

[4]Ibid., pp. 315, 318.

[5]Garland G. Parker, "Enrollments in American Two-Year Colleges, 1972-73: Statistics, Interpretations, and Trends," *Intellect*, 101:2349, April 1973, p. 460.

[6]Parker, "College and University Enrollments in America, 1972-73," p. 332.

[7]Parker, "Enrollments in American Two-Year Colleges, 1972-73," p. 469.

[8]University of Cincinnati press releases, October 25 and December 14, 1972.

[9]"Summary Table, Aggregate United States," Prepublication release, preliminary data, issued by National Center for Educational Statistics, U.S. Office of Education, December 11, 1972.

the data, this prognosticator in January 1973 revised his estimated total downward slightly to 9,205,000.[10] At the same time, on the basis of his study of their enrollments, he estimated the student grand total in all 2-year colleges to be about 2,634,000, a 5.7% increase, in comparison to a USOE-estimated figure of 2,625,015, a 5.4% increase.[11]

An examination of 1972-73 enrollments by selected institutional categories, as well as by full-time and part-time enrollment divisions, is of interest. In the 4-year schools, full-time enrollment changes were as follows: public-complex universities, a loss of .7%; private-complex schools, off by .2%; multipurpose institutions, down by 1.7%; arts and sciences, a drop of only 1.8%; and teachers colleges, a sharp decline of 5.6%. On the other hand, full-time gains were registered in the following categories: unitary state systems, 2.4%; technological, professional, and related schools, 1.2%; fine arts, applied arts, and music schools, .4%; and theological schools, .6%. The overall full-time decrease was .4%.[12]

In the 2-year colleges, the rise in total full-time enrollment was only .2%; and, by categories, the public institutions gained .1%, church schools declined .2%, and other independent colleges fell off 4%. In other classifications, the full-time gains were .5% for community colleges, 8.2% for technical/vocational schools, and 11.2% for university branches/campuses/centers. At the same time, there were full-time percentage losses for schools classified as junior colleges (primarily liberal arts, transfer-oriented units) of 3.2% and 9.5% for multipurpose schools.[13]

Part-time enrollments, however, tell another story. In the 4-year schools, with a total 2.1% increase, there were decreases by category of 1.5% in private-complex and 1.2% in technological and professional schools. Increases appeared in fine arts, applied arts, and music, 37.3%; theological, 13.2%; arts and sciences, 2.9%; unitary, 4.2%; teachers colleges, 2.6%; public-complex, 1.9%; and multipurpose, 1.3%.[14] In the 2-year institutions, by institutional types, the part-time percentage changes were as follows: public, rise of 12.9%; church, up 16%; and other independent schools, a rise of 9.5%. In all 2-year schools, the part-time gain was 12.9%. By another classification, the part-time changes were as follows: junior colleges, up 17.8%; community, a 12.2% rise; technical/vocational, 17.7%; university branches/campuses/centers, 6.7%; and multipurpose, a gain of 12.8%.[15]

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[10]University of Cincinnati press release, January 31, 1973.

[11]"Summary Table . . .," USOE.

[12]Parker, "College and University Enrollments in America, 1972-73," pp. 318-331.

[13]Parker, "Enrollments in American Two-Year Colleges, 1972-73," pp. 459-460, 467-468.

[14]Parker, "College and University Enrollments in America, 1972-73," pp. 315-317.

[15]Parker, "Enrollments in American Two-Year Colleges, 1972-73," pp. 459-460, 467-468.

Enrollment Trends

But enough for the citation of statistics! Other pertinent figures and comments appear in the cited February and April, 1973, issues of *Intellect,* but what do the data mean? What are the enrollment trends that command current attention? Enumeration and brief comment upon those developments that seem to be discernible in the enrollment haze of the mid-1970s may be helpful:

1. There was the obvious overall slowdown in postsecondary/collegiate enrollments in 1972-73; they still were increasing but at a much slower pace than in recent years.

2. Within the matrix of overall enrollments, the increase of full-time enrollments came to a halt. Even in the 2-year schools, there was only a .2% increase; and the 4-year institutions actually declined .4%. In effect, full-time enrollments in all schools came to a standstill; and, given the many complex factors involved, any sudden reversion to an increase pattern is unlikely.

3. Part-time enrollments by contrast with full-time, however, experienced an upsurge in the 2-year schools with their 12.9% increase.

4. Unitary state systems in both the 4- and 2-year categories are continuing to increase in number and in enrollments. The comparably reporting systems analyzed in the 4-year colleges study for 1972-73 showed increases of 2.4% in full-time, 4.2% in part-time, and 2.9% in grand total students. Given the pendulum swing toward this direction for many years past, allegedly in the push for efficiency, economy, equality of opportunity, and hastened by political pressures, centralized state control of postsecondary education recently has been given a mighty thrust via the channeling of federal financial support to the collegiate institutions through state higher education boards and commissions. This procedure has been greatly enhanced by the provisions of the Education Amendments of 1972 and their implications. Unquestionably, there is much that is justifiable in the unitary system approach to the organization of higher education, but also there are factors involved that may be viewed with alarm. In previous writings, the author has given attention to both sides of the unitary system question but it deserves continued consideration.[16]

5. The public-complex universities, for many years among the academic standard-bearers of the enrollment ranks, faltered in 1972-73 with a .7% full-time loss, a 1.9% part-time gain, and an overall .1% gain in enrollments. In addition, they are experiencing severe internal stresses as they adjust to the leveling off of state funds and a downward drift in federal financing.

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[16]Parker, "College and University Enrollments in America, 1972-73," pp. 318, 325.

6. The multipurpose colleges and universities, mostly public, also have come upon hard times. With losses of 1.7% in full-time, a total loss of 1%, and a freshman decline of 6.2%, along with funding restrictions and program overextensions, especially at the graduate level, these schools have real problems; the boom days are over.[17]

7. In the private sector, there is more stability than expected by many. The private-complex universities only had a .2% full-time loss and actually increased the freshman count by 1.7%. With a larger applicant pool than needed to fill freshman classes, their admissions officers simply went a little deeper into the applicant ranks to get their quotas—and perhaps took a few more to help balance out the dollar shortage in the till. There is no reason this prestige-school group cannot continue this performance in the years immediately ahead.

8. The 4-year arts and sciences colleges held their own much better than many dismal prophets had foretold. To be certain, some private schools either have closed or will close their doors, but not in the number and at the rate often predicted. In fact, with only a 1.8% full time loss, a 2% freshman decline, and a 2.9% part-time increase, the grand total count was down only .1%. The 2-year church-related and the other independent 2-year colleges did just about as well with grand total downages of only .2% and .6%, respectively. These schools are accustomed to fighting for their enrollment and financial lives and, in many cases, were better prepared for the fray than their public counterparts. They are flexible, innovative, cost-conscious, and less hampered by bureaucracies than the public units, as a rule; and despite the rigors of the 1970s, they may be counted upon to be around for a while and continue to render significant service in the higher education arena.

9. Teachers college data are elusive enrollment statistics, but such as there are suggest that teacher enrollments still are on the downgrade with losses of 5.6% full-time students and 3.6% in total enrollments. Indications are, however, that the education enrollment toboggan is reaching the bottom of its slide, soon will level out, and may even start up again.

10. It is significant that enrollments in technological and professional types of schools actually experienced gains of up to 1.2% in total enrollments in 1972-73, which was a welcome development.[18] When interrelated with data for the 2-year colleges, that showed 11.3% increases in technical/vocational schools, for example, there is evidence of a strong student leaning toward technological/professional/vocational/service-oriented areas of training. So long as this can happen without an undue sacrifice of arts and sciences

[17]Ibid., pp. 315, 317, 325, 327-328.

[18]Ibid., pp. 315, 317, 327-332.

education components in their programs, this observer views this trend with commendation, especially when one is thoughtful of the great technological and social problems that overhang our society—and threaten its very existence—in the 1970s.[19]

11. Sex in college always is an interesting subject. Since 1960, this writer has collected and interpreted data indicative of the proportion of men and women in higher education and the gains or losses of men vs. women. In that period, women have been gaining steadily in actual number and proportionately to men. In 1972-73, women comprised 41.9% of all comparable full-time enrollments in the 4-year schools and showed a 2% gain, whereas the men declined by 2.1%.[20] In 1971-72, the female percentage was 41.1%;[21] and 10 years ago, in 1963-64, it was 38.6%.[22] In 1972-73, women in the 2-year colleges made up 41.8% of the enrollment total. The Census Bureau has reported, on the basis of a population survey, that, of all 18- and 19-year-olds in 1962, the men exceeded the women by some 12%, but in 1972 the margin was only 3%.[23] Given the present emphasis upon affirmative action, women's liberation, and many other factors, there is little doubt that the increase trend for women in higher education will continue.

12. Contrary to the thrust of recent years when the Middle West, the Far West, the Southwest, and the Mountain States often were the increase leaders, in 1972-73, the gain leaders geographically were New England, with a 2.6% rise, and the Middle Atlantic, South Atlantic, and West South Central areas with somewhat lower increases.[24]

13. Veteran enrollments gained in 1972-73 by 13.7%, after a peak rise of 31.7% in 1971-72. The veterans total will increase again in 1973-74, but probably by a lesser percentage gain than for the previous year.[25]

14. While the ACT-*Intellect* study of 2-year colleges has not been underway long enough to provide comparative data over the years, this observer's perception

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[19]Parker, "Enrollments in American Two-Year Colleges, 1972-73," pp. 467-468.

[20]Parker, "College and University Enrollments in America, 1972-73," p. 334.

[21]Garland G. Parker, "College and University Enrollments in America, 1971-72," *School & Society*, 100:2339, February 1972, p. 130.

[22]Garland G. Parker, "Statistics of Attendance in American Universities and Colleges, 1963-64," *School & Society*, 92:2236, January 1964, p. 8.

[23]*Chronicle of Higher Education*, 7:22, March 5, 1973, p. 1.

[24]Parker, "College and University Enrollments in America, 1972-73," p. 335.

[25]Ibid., pp. 334-335.

is that there is a mighty movement toward career education options in the 4-year as well as 2-year schools but especially in the latter. For some years to come there will be a need for career education trainees in this highly technological and complex society of ours. In 141 2-year schools reporting comparably for 1972-73, 56.5% of their 159,439 students were enrolled in essentially terminal career education programs; and many comprising the remaining 43.5%, although in transfer options, also were pursuing career education objectives.[26]

15. Graduate enrollments, to the surprise of some, held up much better in 1972-73 than expected by showing a gain of about 2%.[27] With many graduate schools pulling out all the stops, as it were, to meet budgeted enrollment goals, closed enrollments in law and medicine, many undergraduates out of jobs, and family resources often still unexhausted, it is small wonder that graduate enrollments in most institutions held firm or gained. In fact, early counts suggest that graduate applications have increased significantly for the fall of 1973. In the future, in anticipation of a further falloff in federal funding and continued constriction of state finances, it seems likely that more graduate students will be called upon to pay a larger proportion of their instructional costs than in the past.

16. The disappearing freshman act was by all odds the most interesting phenomenon of the 1972-73 enrollment scene. Where did the freshmen go? As noted earlier, they declined 3.1% in the 4-year schools and .2% in the 2-year units. Several factors were operative here. First, there was the leveling off tendency in the count of 18-year-olds and high school graduates across the country. Second, there was only a .7% increase in full-time freshmen in 1971-72; this should have been a warning of what was ahead. Third, the credibility of and respect for higher education suffered greatly from the activism and unrest of the 1960s and the violence typified by the Kent State-Jackson State episodes, subsequent to the Cambodian invasion of 1970. Many families and children simply decided against collegiate education in the wake of violence. Fourth, too many self-appointed critics both inside and outside of academe did an overkill of the idea that collegiate training itself had been oversold as a means of gaining good jobs and the good life. Many took these mouthpieces of the academic marketplace too seriously and either walked out or chose not to enter the postsecondary/higher education arena at all. Some students are said to be "stopping out" of college while engaging in work, travel, or "finding themselves." Finally, the financial factor, and, particularly, the late federal financial aid funding in the summer of 1972 prevented many thousands of otherwise admitted and motivated students from attending college. Given

[26]Parker, "Enrollments in American Two-Year Colleges, 1972-73," p. 469.

[27]Philip W. Semas, "Graduate School Applications Rise," *Chronicle of Higher Education*, 7:22, March 5, 1973, pp. 1, 3.

these and other deterrents, the wonder is that the freshman class in 1972-73 was as large as it was![28]

Factors to Consider in the Future

But, what of the future? Everyone always presses for forecasts of future enrollments and trends affecting them. The writer's preference is for reporting and interpreting both past and present enrollment developments, and he is reluctant to be cast in the role of a soothsayer for the future. Nevertheless, there are some apparent present trends that merit mention as follows:

1. First, we need to determine whether the percentage of high school graduates going on to college will continue to decrease as it appears it has in the last 2 or 3 years. According to Ronald Thompson, in Ohio, for example, the percent of high school graduates going on to Ohio colleges and universities as first-time students has dropped from 57.1% in 1969 to 49.8% in 1972, a decline of 7.3% in 3 years.[29] Will this trend bottom out and reverse itself, or will it continue on the downgrade?

2. What impact will the growth of technical/vocational educational programs in the high schools have upon collegiate attendance? There is an intensive development in this respect in Ohio, for example, and many students are making a direct entry into the job market right out of high school who otherwise might have entered college. Similar situations prevail in many states. Will this development continue to siphon off even more students who normally would be college bound? It is likely to do so for some years and thereby lessen the pool of potential college students.

3. Will the "stop outs" and "drop outs" reenter the academic mainstream in the years just ahead? Some will, even as full-time students, but probably more will be part-time enrollees in the late afternoons and evenings. Some will find themselves laboring under incurred burdens that will preclude their returning at all—this is one of the tragedies of "stop out" education patterns.

4. What will the effect be of the educational services rendered by the private ("for-profit") proprietary schools in the remaining 1970s? The implications of the Education Amendments of 1972, the gain of these schools in public acceptance, their thrust toward accreditation, and the actual as well as

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[28]Parker, "College and University Enrollments in America, 1971-72," pp. 331-332.

[29]Letter from Ronald B. Thompson to Presidents and Directors of Institutions of Higher Education in Ohio, March 9, 1973; see also, Ronald B. Thompson, "Changing Trends in the Field of Higher Education," *The College Store Journal*, February/March 1973, p. 74.

potential infusion of the capital of corporations and conglomerates into them suggest that they will be a formidable force with which the traditional public and private nonprofit schools must reckon in the future.

5. There will be the personpower available for overall postsecondary enrollment increases throughout the 1970s. The 18-year-old pool will continue to increase through 1975, and high school graduates will rise through 1980-81.

6. Other factors that will tend to sustain enrollments will be, hopefully, the recovery of confidence in college training by parents and students; the possibility that employers will place more emphasis on advanced training than so many would-be prophets have proclaimed in recent years; the thesis that college is as important or more so for its impact upon life enrichment than it is professionally; and emphasis upon affirmative action programs that call for intensive recruitment of women and minorities. The concepts of continuing, intermittent, refresher, and nontraditional education programs will make education more amenable for many patrons in society. Finally, it should be recalled that the high increase bulge or curve of students who were in college in the late 1960s now is providing an enlarged pool of candidates for continuing and/or part-time education. The heyday of the part-time student is ahead of us, and the school that does not bestir itself to meet innovatively the demands of the part-timers may be left waiting at the enrollment gate.

7. Earlier, this observer had anticipated that in the 1970s grand total college and university enrollments in the U.S. would increase by 50% or more. It now appears unlikely that the total enrollment increase in postsecondary education will reach that level. Whatever the growth may be, however, the enrollment mix will be more fragmented than in the past. Part-time and continuing education will grow significantly, private proprietary enrollments will increase and may flourish, 2-year colleges will continue their growth but at a much more slackened pace, and the traditional 4-year institutions will fight for their lives in the fiercely competitive field looming ahead. They probably will hold their own in enrollments, perhaps even increase slightly in the remaining 1970s, and may become the better institutions for their struggle, but their experience will be a critical and painful one for them.

Conclusion

There are other aspects of and details pertaining to enrollments now and in the future that would deserve our attention, if time and space permitted. The objective has been to give an overview of the enrollment kaleidoscope as it appears today, and to provide some vision of how it may change tomorrow. There are many other facets of this many-sided problem, but it is hoped that the facts and opinions set forth here will be helpful.

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